

COMMONALITY AND PECULIARTIES IN THE NATIONAL HOLIDAYS OF THE PEOPLES OF CENTRAL ASIA

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INTRODUCTION

Recent academic literature on Central Asia has shown an increasing interest in holidays and the celebrations that mark such days as a way of understanding nation- and state-building policies in the region. This CADGAT dataset provides a good starting point for a comparative approach. It presents an overview of national holidays in the five Central Asian countries: what the holidays are and when they are celebrated; and traces the development of national holidays (some are no longer celebrated, whereas new ones have arrived) back to independence in 1991. The data were collected between March and September 2014 by individual researchers in each of the five countries. Variation in terms of data availability and quality across the countries must be noted. The sources and methods used are listed in footnotes. This report is the first about various aspects of holidays in Central Asia. In this report, we present public holidays and the laws and regulations on holidays in the five countries. The second report in this series concerns the phenomenon of 'professional holidays' in the five countries.

Main findings - The five Central Asian countries have four holidays in common: New Year's Day (1 January), Women's Day (8 March), the Spring Equinox (21/22 March) and Victory Day (9 May). - Kyrgyzstan has kept more of the Soviet era holidays after independence than the other countries. - Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the only two countries in which Orthodox Christmas is still a day off (celebrated on 7 January). - With the exception of Uzbekistan, all the countries have kept the Soviet tradition of moving holidays that fall on a Sunday to the next working day. - Uzbekistan is the country with the lowest number of celebrated holidays as well as the lowest number of days off in total - In Kazakhstan, new holidays have been devoted to the first president of the country, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Similar holidays were established in Turkmenistan during the rule of Saparmurat Niyazov, but were abolished in 2008.

In 2014 the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Youth introduced amendments to the Labour Code, which would have cancelled celebrations on 23 February (Defender of the Fatherland Day), 5 May (Constitution Day) and 7 November (Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution).¹⁵ On 31 December 2013, a corresponding bill of law had been submitted to the Parliament for consideration. The same amendments proposed setting New Year holidays from 1 to 3 January. The reasons for eliminating the three first-mentioned holidays were the following. On the Fatherland's Defenders' Day, it is said that by Presidential decree, the Day of Kyrgyzstani Armed Forces was announced on 29 May 1992. Celebrating Constitution's Day on 5 May lost relevance due to repeated changes in the constitution made in recent years. As the Kyrgyz Republic is the only country in Central Asia to celebrate 7 November as the Day of the Great October Socialist, the drafters of the bill proposed excluding this holiday from the list of festive dates. In May 2014, members of parliament decided that the bill required improvements, and it was withdrawn from the Parliament.¹⁶

As of 2014, Turkmenistan has eleven official holidays, which are days off. When a public holiday falls on a Sunday, it is postponed to the next working day. On a pre-holiday day, the working day is one hour shorter (in 2014 there were six such days). The President of Turkmenistan has the right to transfer holidays that coincide with weekend days to other working days. Since independence, special anniversaries associated with the history of Turkmenistan and with significant events of independence have been celebrated. These are Memorial Day (12 January) in

honour of those who died defending Geoktepe Fortress on 12 January 1881; Day of Remembrance and National Mourning dedicated to the memory of National Heroes of Turkmenistan of the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945 (8 May, but abolished again in 2008); Day of Remembrance, dedicated to the memory of victims of the Ashgabat earthquake in 1948; Independence Day of Turkmenistan, Neutrality Day; the Feast of the State Flag of Turkmenistan; and the Day of Revival, Unity and Poetry of Magtymguly Fragy. In 2014, however, Memorial Day on 12 January was abolished and 6 October was announced as Memorial Day, by presidential decree.²⁵

There are also several holidays that have been added, changed or removed since independence. In 1993 the Parliament of Turkmenistan adopted a resolution establishing 19 February, the birthday of President Saparmurat Niyazov, as a holiday and day off work; this was rescinded in 1994 by Presidential Decree. By a new Decree (signed 26 December 1994), 19 February was announced as National Flag Day and declared a day off work. 27 1 May was also removed as a national holiday after independence.²⁸ 8 March was celebrated as Women's Day until 2001. In 2001 former President Saparmurat Niyazov excluded this day from the list of holidays and announced 20 March as Women's Day, which coincides with his mother's birthday. 29 Novruz Bayramy (21–22 March) and Women's Day together were proclaimed the National Holiday of Spring and Women. In January 2008, in accordance with the Law on Amendments to the Labour Code of Turkmenistan, Women's Day was moved back to 8 March and declared as a day off.³⁰ 21 March was announced as Novruz Bayramy – Holiday of Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic and was declared a day off.³¹ The Spring Holiday is now celebrated with two days off work. 21 June was celebrated as the Day of the Election of the First President, but was never a day off. It was removed from the list in 2008.

As of 2014, in Uzbekistan there are nine official holidays, which are days off. When a public holiday falls on a Sunday, legislation does not provide for automatic transfer of the holiday to the next or previous working day. However, the President of Uzbekistan may issue a decree transferring the holiday to another day. On a pre-holiday day, the working day is one hour shorter (in 2014 there were nine such days). A number of Soviet-era holidays were abolished in Uzbekistan soon after independence. Among these are 7 November (Day of Great Socialist Revolution), and 23 February (Fatherland Defenders' Day). Fatherland Defenders' Day was moved from 23 February to 14 January in accordance with the law of the Republic of Uzbekistan as of 29 December 1993; the 'Fatherland' is now Uzbekistan, not the Soviet Union.³³ Another Soviet-era holiday was 27 November, the Day of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan, which marked the day in 1924 when Uzbekistan appeared on the map in its current form.³⁴ In the late 1990s, 1 May was abolished as Labour Day; 1 May was declared as a 'Day of Fountains' in 2014.

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